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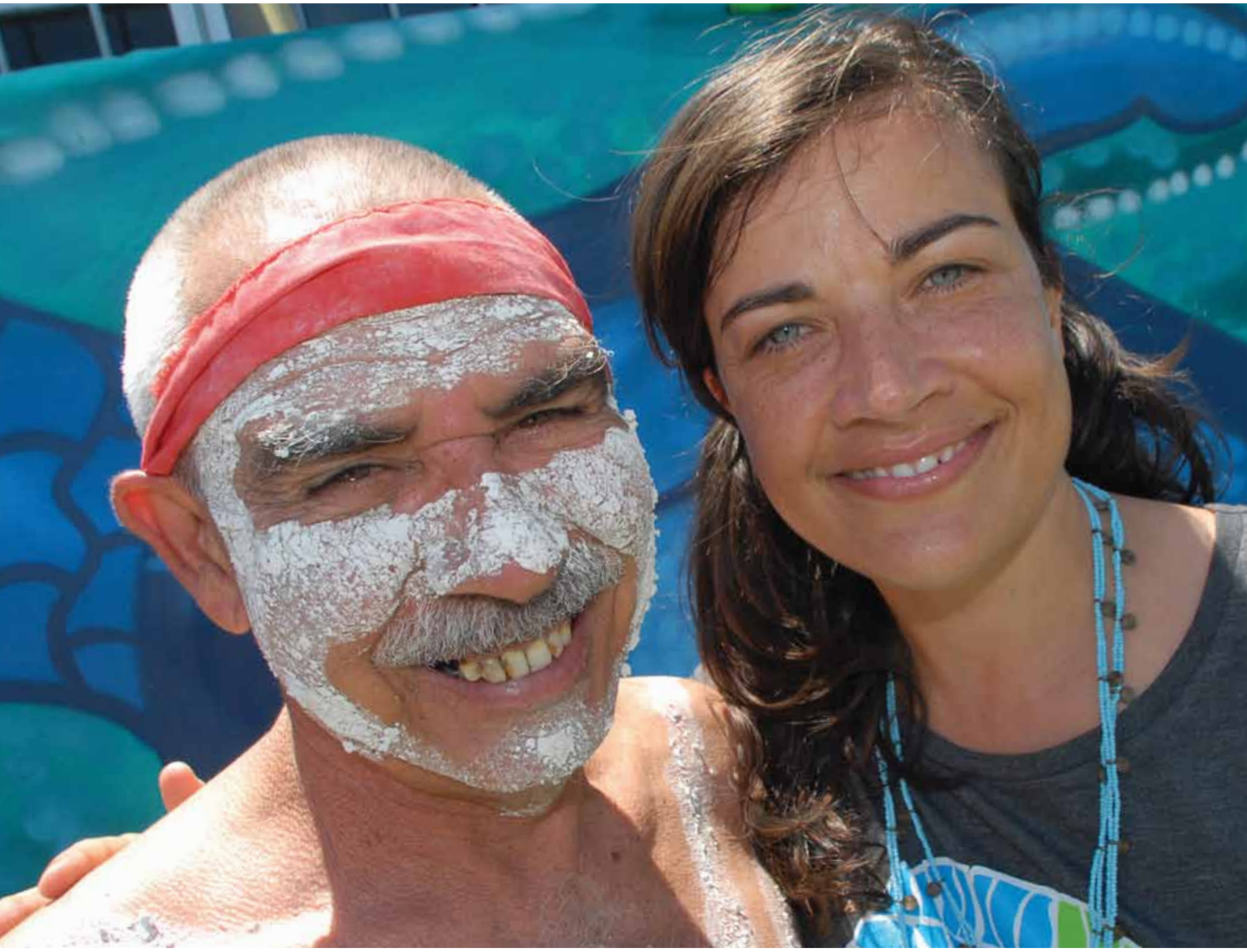
Goree

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER news

FROM THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA



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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

Welcome. I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples and the important contribution that they make to the National Museum of Australia.

As I am sure you are aware, the Museum has strong engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia and, on many occasions throughout the year, community representatives visit the Museum for the opening of exhibitions, to visit collections, or just to enjoy the galleries. At the recent opening of the stunning *Yalangbara*, members of the Marika family from north-east Arnhem Land performed a moving opening ceremony. Their visit was made all the more comfortable by the customary 'welcome' that was offered to them by Matilda House, a Senior Elder of the Canberra region. Such welcomes are much more than a courtesy, as our visitors seriously respect the traditional rights of the Ngambri and Ngunnawal and see their permission to be on country as an essential preliminary to their visits.

It has certainly been a busy time at the Museum. While the task of delivering exhibitions and content is a high visibility task there is also much happening behind the scenes. We are currently engaged in planning changes that will refresh and improve our First Australians galleries and exhibitions as well as other content which is delivered through the web and publishing.

Future planning is influenced by the philosophy that the Museum is much more than bricks and mortar. It is a centre, also, for the collation and distribution of experience and knowledge — a fact that is increasingly recognised both nationally and internationally. The National Museum of Australia prides itself on the way in which it has managed to step out of the building and engage with First Australians communities on their country. Many international visitors are stunned by the way in which the Museum assigns priority to the voices of First Australians, with their words coming before the words of the curator. This reflects a change in direction to allow audiences to engage with First Australians cultures through the words of those people who have experienced those histories and cultures directly. Those stories speak for themselves and, as the success of our exhibitions shows, it is those stories that our audiences want to hear.

So, I invite you to join with us as we move into the next stages of Museum growth. It's sure to be an exciting time.

Andrew Sayers AM

Yalangbara exhibition opening

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL ADVISOR (INDIGENOUS) TO THE DIRECTOR, AND SENIOR CURATOR

I would like to acknowledge the local Ngunnawal and Ngambri people from the Canberra region, and others of our community who have made Canberra and its surrounds home.

While I usually focus in this message on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment numbers, and the various entry pathways into the Museum, this time I will highlight the quality of the people that we get and the experiences and opportunities the Museum offers. Rebecca Richards, one of our former cadets and now a staff member, '… has made history as the first Aboriginal Australian to win the coveted Rhodes Scholarship …' as headlined by the ABC's *7.30 Report* on 1 March. She is in illustrious company — other Australian Rhodes scholars have been Tony Abbott, Kim Beazley, Sir Zelman Cowan, Bob Hawke, Geoffrey Robertson, Malcolm Turnbull and Howard Florey.

Of course, this will not be news to most as Rebecca has been on a media roller-coaster, with coverage from coast to coast. Cadets like Rebecca do stints getting experience across many areas of the Museum. Fortunately for her (and us), she got to work on the *Barks, Birds & Billabongs* project, an international symposium, which led to her winning a placement at the Smithsonian Institution. She is currently working on a major British Museum project and researching our bark collection for a future exhibition. There's no doubt that the invaluable support received from key staff members, like Mikki Campbell, has contributed to Rebecca's success, as it has to the retention and success of other cadets: Simon Goode was nominated for an advanced skills program, Ben Cruse now works in Education and Public Programs, while Lorna Woodcock has won a curatorial position on the British Museum project. New cadet, Sarah Bourke, has started with Visitor Services.

Finally a deadly thanks to Mikki, who leaves a memorable legacy as she moves into retirement.

Margo Neale

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD, ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PROGRAM

Welcome. I'd like to acknowledge the Ngambri and Ngunnawal traditional custodians of the Canberra region, and all those who are a part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the Australian Capital Territory.

This year, we hit the ground running. The exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* was a great success, attracting the largest audience for a Museum exhibition to date with attendance of around 122,000. The exhibition clearly touched a nerve with our audiences. Its success counters the idea that Australian audiences are fatigued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. This exhibition proved that the mood is quite the reverse — audiences want to find out more about the stories, lives and histories behind the art. We were fortunate that several of the Aboriginal curators and filmmakers could attend the last days and witness the popularity of their work.

Yalangbara: Art of the Djang'kawu, an exhibition of captivating artworks by the Marika family from north-east Arnhem Land which explore the journey of the Djang'kawu ancestors, is also proving to be a popular exhibition. Developed by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in collaboration with the Marika family and the National Museum, this exhibition brings together works by various family members produced over a period of 80 years.

Behind the scenes, we continue to plan future exhibitions, educational programs and content. We work on policies and processes that will help the Museum to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, objects and stories at the highest ethical standard. We advise museums, both nationally and internationally, on how they might improve the way that they approach collaborations with other cultural groups. We are particularly interested in ensuring that curatorial and collection management skills are being passed on to emerging curators working in community-based art centres, and we have a small but important 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentoring project' working to this end.

These stories, and many more, are told in this issue of *Goree*. We hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to check out the Museum website at www.nma.gov.au for more information.

Michael Pickering

Inside *Yiwarra Kuju*

ATSIAA collection in storage

Yalangbara

art of the Djang'kawu

Opening attendees had the rare opportunity to see the Marika family perform ceremony 'singing' the spirits in the exhibition

Dancing around the sculptures representing the Djang'kawu Sisters

Mawalan Marika speaking at opening

Museum Director Andrew Sayers accepting the gift from Richard Yunupingu on behalf of the Marika family

Yalangbara, the most important of the Marika family's clan estates is a stunning, boulder-studded place surrounded by sparkling white sand and turquoise waters. Yalangbara, or Port Bradshaw, is the place the Djang'kawu sisters chose as the place to come ashore after their long sea voyage from Burralku.

They began creating sites before they landed and continued their creative journey, bringing forth fresh springs and the many features of the landscape, on their journey inland.

The Marika family chose to celebrate and share their knowledge of this important place — knowledge that has been hidden and secret for thousands of years — in an exhibition at the Museum of the paintings and objects made by family members in *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang'kawu*.

The exhibition opened in a spectacular way with a successful Museum opening coming first. Welcomes and speeches were made with much praise for the Marika family and their artworks, and for the wonderful sight of so many objects being brought together from collections around the country.

However, senior brothers, Mawalan Marika and Richard Yunupingu, had explained that their participation in this event was only a part of what they expected to do in opening the exhibition. This form of opening was a 'white' convention; there was another way of opening an exhibition that they would perform — a Yolngu opening.

During this, the Marika family performed a short ceremony in which they engaged with objects in the exhibition as they danced their way through the crowded gallery. At this point, they talked to the ancestors and animated the objects. Because the objects are not merely objects, but rather the physical manifestation of the ancestors, engagement with them was the primary concern of the family. Permissions were sought and connections remade and, as a result, the exhibition could be declared 'open' to the public.

In the days following the opening, Mawalan decided that the successful engagement with the Museum should be marked in some way and our relationship should continue. The senior men decided to leave something with the Museum that would forever link it to them and their Rirratjingu ancestors. One of the digging sticks that had been used in the Yolngu opening of the exhibition was selected as an appropriate object for this purpose. The sticks had been made at Yalangbara and brought to Canberra for the event.

The digging stick was formally presented to our Director, Andrew Sayers, in a small ceremony, during which it was impressed on him and those present that the digging stick was not merely a wooden object, but that it was implicated in that first journey of the Djang'kawu sisters and the creation of the sites in the clan estate. The Museum should care for the digging stick in perpetuity and, when any members of the Marika family returns to Canberra, and perhaps has need to use it in future ceremonial occasions, it should be available to them. And, of course, they will be welcome.

Andy Greenslade *Curator, ATSIP*

Public Programs:
Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route

Artist talks in Yiwarra Kuju

Casey Keed

The rich and vibrant exhibition *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* provided a wealth of inspiration for a wonderful program of family events and activities that were presented at the National Museum of Australia during January. The Hall buzzed with excitement when over 2700 children and their families enjoyed the drop-in discovery space from 10–25 January. Broad themes of family, place and stories were discussed with children after they had visited the *Yiwarra Kuju* exhibition, and they were invited to personalise and paint these themes on a small canvas board using tools such as paddle-pop sticks, straws and cotton filters. Children could take their masterpiece home, and also contribute to an enormous collaborative mural, which was later displayed in the Museum.

Helping to add to the atmosphere were seven large termite mounds that were built especially for the program. Every child who went to see *Yiwarra Kuju* used the giant multimedia table and took great delight drawing in the virtual sand and squashing virtual ants. In the discovery space, children were given the opportunity draw some ants on stickers and bring them back to life by sticking them to the termite mounds. By the end of the program, the mounds were swarming with ant stickers.

It was great to have Aboriginal cadet Ben Cruse work in the Public Programs team throughout the summer holidays. Ben helped to prepare materials for the program and he was part of the staff team in the discovery space. Although Public Programs took him down a different path from his university studies in anthropology and archaeology studies, the experience broadened his understanding of Museum operations.

Complementing the free, drop-in discovery space were two fully subscribed workshops that were tailored for children aged 8 years and above. The Paint that Yarn workshop was facilitated by local Aboriginal contemporary artist Helen S Tiernan who is also a Visitor Services Host at the Museum. Helen acted as an enthusiastic guide for children on a tour of the exhibition and imparted knowledge and practical skills such as using texture, colour, layering and patterning techniques to represent imagery and stories. During the workshop, Helen used oil pastels and paints to create different mixed media layers. She also demonstrated using different tools for scratch-back techniques and different textured materials such as lace and non-slip mats to create patterning in the wet paint.

The My Place sculpture workshops challenged participants to construct a personal diorama of their special place or landscape using clay, wire, pebbles, sand and natural materials mounted on a wooden base. The workshop was facilitated by Ali Aedy, a local sculptor and public artist, who led children through the exhibition and then shared practical skills on how to work with clay, different techniques of modelling, and placement. Some amazing artworks resulted from both the painting and sculpture workshops.

After six months of enchanting and delighting over 120,000 visitors, the last day of the *Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route* exhibition on 26 January 2011 was cause for celebration. The Museum did this in style with a family festival day that attracted over 2500 people. Kicking off the day was a fabulous performance by Freshwater — four young women with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage who sang traditional and contemporary songs, some in traditional language, with wonderful vocal harmonies. They were followed later in the day by the 2010 NAIDOC youth of the

Photo: Damian McDonald

Showing off the headdress made at the Family Festival on 26 January 2011

year Casey Keed who sang accompanied by her father, Dean. Casey is someone to watch out for in the future. Wiradjuri storyteller Larry Brandy also delighted kids with his interactive storytelling performances; and special guests from Wagga Wagga, Anthony Rennick and his four daughters, amazed the audiences who braved the heat outside with whip-cracking and whip-making demonstrations in the amphitheatre.

Two art and craft activities were facilitated by practising artists Helen Tiernan and Tonya Jefferis in the discovery space. Helen helped children create unique textured and patterned artworks using coloured card and crayons and, inspired by the headdress in the exhibition, Tonya showed children how to make colourful headdresses using a variety of interesting materials. Aboriginal cadets Ben Cruse and Lorna Woodcock had fun getting their hands dirty while helping to create a couple of giant rainbow snake chalk-art murals.

Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route certainly was a memorable exhibition and its associated programs were enjoyed and appreciated by many. A special highlight was that five of the artists associated with the exhibition travelled back to Canberra to be involved in the final day. Co-curator John Carty and the artists were able to use this final event at the Museum to once again give wonderful insights into the show and its development.

Kellie Robson *Senior Coordinator, Family Programs Audience Development and Public Programs*

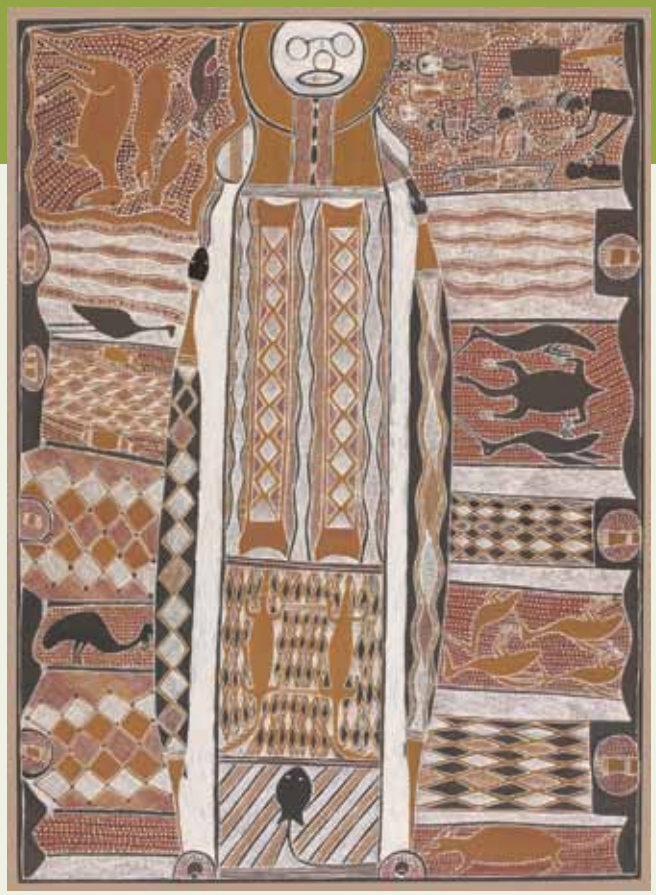
Lorna Woodcock and the rainbow serpent chalk art activity

Ben Cruse helping out in the discovery space

Freshwater performing

Helen Tiernan demonstrating some techniques in the Paint that Yarn *workshop*

An extraordinary collection



(left) Mortuary Ceremony *1978 by Narritjin Maymuru*

(above) *Description of the iconography in the painting by Maymuru*

(below) Untitled *painting by Robert Eggington, 1999*

An extraordinary collection of art — and other things — came to the Museum in 2007. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Art Collection, which represents almost 40 years of collecting by various Australian Government agencies for Aboriginal affairs.

After being closed by the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act 2005*, packers and carriers arrived at ATSIC offices around the country to remove assets — the pictures from the walls, the carved animals, the baskets and fibre ware, spears, trophies and posters. In fact, anything that related to art or was considered of enduring interest was removed.

They found most things hanging on the walls of the offices — fabrics and a rug from Ernabella, watercolours from Hermannsburg and from Western Australia's Carrolup art tradition, bark paintings from across the Top End, and paintings from Papunya. All of these and more were taken to Sydney for storage until a decision could be made on what to do with these works, which are considered of national interest. The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) became the next custodian of the collection and it was charged with the task of finding a permanent home for the collection's approximately 2000 objects.

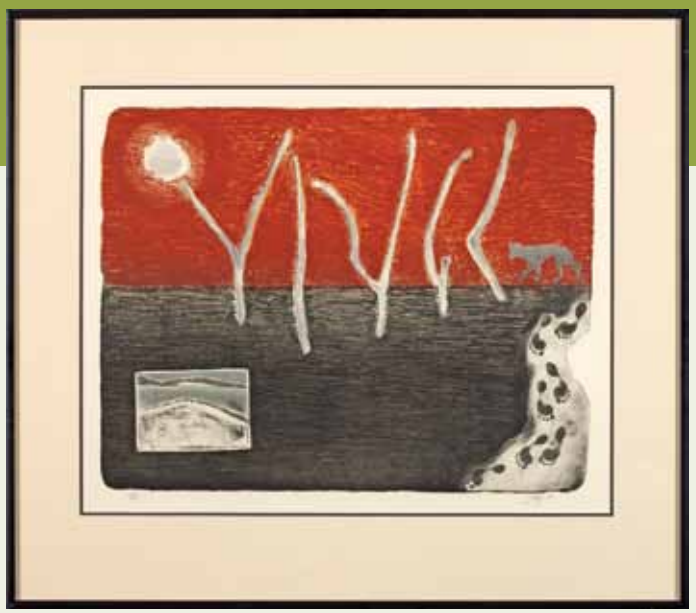
After a period of negotiation with various institutions it was decided that the collection would be transferred to the National Museum, where it would be kept together in perpetuity in the National Historical Collection.

It was an unusually large collection — much larger than the Museum would normally accept. But this collection is much more important than the sum of its individual artworks. The collection is an 'historical record', charting the years over which it was collected. The paintings, posters, animals and weapons had witnessed all the comings and goings in the offices of various, now-defunct, Aboriginal Affairs agencies. These objects watched silently as politicians and community representatives, who had formed policy, argued over the best way to support communities, and how to service programs within communities. Just as those objects were silent witnesses to that history in the making, they have also come to reflect the human aspects unique to each of the local offices.

The importance of these objects as witnesses is amplified by the lack of documentation on their procurement or even the rationale behind the gathering of such a large collection. In the absence of a clear story, we use the objects to draw our own conclusions about their purpose and what they witnessed, or even their significance in local and national events. Some objects may not represent any theme or purpose — perhaps they were just acquired to adorn the walls of the offices and in support of then fledgling art movements, some of which grew into significant movements in the international art scene. There are, however, some solid facts that stand alongside any assumptions we make about this collection as a whole and the individual objects within.

To refer to it as the ATSIC collection is a misnomer, for the collection was not all acquired by ATSIC and much of it was inherited from earlier institutions. In fact, there were many more years of collecting art and objects than ATSIC existed. Pieces were acquired by a number of different bodies. They were the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA), the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Development Commission and, later, ATSIC. The earliest purchases were by the CAA soon after its formation following the 1967 referendum. Dr 'Nugget' Coombs, Professor WEH Stanner and Barrie Dexter, who had been invited by Prime Minister Harold Holt to form the CAA, decided that they would only hang Aboriginal art

Artworks and objects from offices involved with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs from the Council of Aboriginal Affairs to OIPC



Fraser Island *limited edition print (42/50) by Fiona Foley, 1990*

Miner's Cottage *painting by Gordon Syron, 1982*

on the office walls. Dexter, who recently visited the Museum to see a part of the collection that is in storage, mentioned that if there was any money left in the CAA budget, towards the end of the financial year, it would be put towards adding to the collection.

This early period was clearly an exciting time in arts as well as in politics. The announcement to begin building the National Gallery of Australia was made in 1967 and, in 1973, Jackson Pollock's famous and controversial painting, *Blue Poles*, was purchased for a record sum. Perhaps this atmosphere, and the formation of the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) in 1973, inspired the CAA to purchase the artwork to decorate its offices. In fact, a number of items in the collection bear the marks of acquisition through the Arts Board.

The character of the collection changed as it passed from one agency to the next during the 38 years between the establishment of CAA in 1967 and the closure of ATSIC in 2005. While the early years saw the acquisition of bark paintings, carvings and watercolours, and some of the early Papunya acrylic paintings, artworks collected in later years bear witness to the growth of other movements in art, such as the development of printmaking as a viable medium for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. As a result, the collection can be viewed as a 'snapshot' of 38 years of art production that reveals and records, amongst other things, the introduction of acrylic painting to communities across Australia; the demise of wool work at Ernabella and the growth of the centre's iconic batik tradition; an expanding and enduring watercolour movement in Western Australia and in Hermannsburg; increasing production of art for the tourist market; and the spread to many outer and coastal areas of the desert region style of dot painting.

The presence of certain works can also reveal much about the circumstances that existed at the time the object came into the collection. For example, a stunning Canadian First Nation's mask was given to Charles Perkins at the World Council of Indigenous Peoples conference that was held in Canberra in 1981.

There is a group of paintings, also, that clearly relate to health issues. We have been told that these were painted when a Northern Territory initiative to promote healthy lifestyle choices was carried out in the 1990s. It is likely that these works were transferred, perhaps to ATSIC, from the then Healthy Aboriginal Life Team (HALT). What we do know is that copies of these original paintings were used in the communities to deliver essential health messages. Many of these works were painted by Andrew Spencer Tjapaltjarri and his wife Bertha Dickson Nakamarra.

In the collection there is also a small number of documents clearly valued by ATSIC, including copies of the proclamation of recognition in 1995 of both Harold Thomas's Aboriginal flag, and of the companion Torres Strait Islander flag designed by Bernard Namok, under the Flags Act 1953.

Johnny Mullagh Trophy 2001 awarded to ATSIC in the cricket match with the Prime Minister's XI

There is, however, so much that we don't know about the collection and we are hopeful that we can fill the gaps in our knowledge with stories about individual pieces from the communities and individuals who were involved with them. In October, the Museum will exhibit some of the collection and make it accessible via the website to people who are unable to get to Canberra. All the objects, apart from those which are judged too sensitive for general publication, will be available to view. You will be able to search to find which ATSIC regional or state office held which objects and, if we know, the names of the artists who created them.

If you do find you know things about the collection, please tell us! You'll be able to communicate via the web — or you can call me on 02 6208 5325 to share whatever information you think relevant to the collection records.

Andy Greenslade *Curator, ATSIP*

From Museum cadet to Rhodes scholar

Rebecca and Carol Cooper, in collection storage, looking at objects being researched

When Rebecca Richards was recruited through the National Museum of Australia's inaugural Indigenous cadetship program in 2007, she had just begun a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology and Anthropology) degree at the University of Adelaide. Four years later, having completed her degree while working at the Museum for 12 weeks per year, and gaining professional experience with a range of business units, Rebecca has been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship which will enable her to study at Oxford University.

Rebecca, an Adnyamathanha and Barngala woman from South Australia's Flinders Ranges, is the first Aboriginal person to receive the Rhodes Scholarship in its 108 year history. Rebecca has said that she will be the first Aboriginal woman to study at Oxford, where she plans to undertake a Master of Philosophy (Material Anthropology and Museum Ethnography).

'I want to look at the Aboriginal collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum; it's the anthropology museum associated with Oxford. Some of the objects go back to the late 19th century,' Rebecca said.

'My plan is to study really hard and to meet lots of amazing people while starting to record what is at the Pitt Rivers Museum and assess how Australian researchers and Indigenous communities can better access those collections. I think that's my passion.'

Rebecca said that she first found out about the scholarships during her internship within the Anthropology Department at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. Rebecca said 'I found out that a few of the other interns were applying for the Rhodes Scholarship. I thought, if they can apply, why can't I apply?'

In addition to the Rhodes, Rebecca was also offered two other scholarships — the Fulbright South Australia Scholarship which provides assistance for study in the United States and the John Monash Scholarship for study anywhere in the world.

Rebecca said that she chose the Rhodes Scholarship because Oxford offers her first preference as far as the course goes, but also because she felt it would most comprehensively cover her financial commitments in relation to study, accommodation and living allowances.

Since receiving the scholarship Rebecca has been in touch with two other recipients and the three of them have discussed travelling to Oxford together, specifically embarking on a more adventurous route. 'We're thinking of taking the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to Moscow via Mongolia,' said Rebecca, explaining that, if she's going to travel from one side of the world to the other, it would be great to see a bit of the scenery in between.

Rebecca's advice to new cadets is to embrace their experiences at the National Museum of Australia. 'Make the most of every opportunity here because you never know where it's going to lead. Don't just think of this as a job; it's an opportunity.'

Rebecca hopes to return to the National Museum at some stage in the future: 'My studies at Oxford will fit in well with what the National Museum already does, I hope to come back here at some stage in the future.'

Caroline Vero *Public Affairs*

At the end of the long driveway

(left) Blood Sisters, *mixed media on rag paper (ink, watercolor) by Rachael Romero 1984*
(below) The memorial (left) at the end of the long driveway at the Cootamundra Girls Home, which marks the place where girls would sit, waiting for their parents to take them home.

'Mum came to Sydney and she went to the welfare for help. And the only help she got was that they took the kids off her.'
Rick McLeod[1]

There are buildings all around Australia — some now sit empty, some now house a government service provider, or suchlike — that once were full of children. There are many more buildings that are not even a mark on the ground, pulled down and forgotten. These are the former children's homes that were used widely up to the 1980s to house children who were taken from their families, or surrendered by families unable to provide for their children. We used to call them orphanages, but very few of their inmates were orphans. Mostly, they were the children of the poor and the dispossessed. It is estimated that there were about 500,000 children who were brought up in homes, including some 50,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, taken from their families under the discriminatory policies of the time.

Some homes, like the Cootamundra Girls Home, were specifically for Aboriginal kids. But there were many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in other homes, along with everybody else. That's particularly true of children who were viewed by authorities as 'fair-skinned' because the authorities hoped that, as adults, they would become part of the non-Indigenous community. Indeed, some of these children, who were taken in when they were very young, probably never knew of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and they and their descendants have been lost to their communities forever.

Besides the 'unfortunate' kids in the homes, there were also some who had been sent out, mainly after World War II, from England and Malta as 'child migrants'. Sending these children to Australia, supposedly for a 'better life', was used as a method to empty the over-full orphanages in England.

What was life like in these homes? That's what our new exhibition aims to show when it opens here at the Museum this November, and then tours around Australia. In the exhibition, we tell stories of children who were in the homes, from the groups that now are known as the 'Stolen Generations', 'Former Child Migrants' and the 'Forgotten Australians'. We are putting together histories from all the kids who slept in those long dormitories, ate in those dining rooms, and watched and waited for mum or dad to come up those long driveways and take them home.

So what was it like? There is no single story. Some homes were such violent and abusive places that the stories that come from them would not be believed. Others, though they lacked the extreme violence, were loveless, dreary places in which to grow up. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in these places were brought up to be ashamed of their heritage, of who they were. Wherever possible, they were cut off from their communities. As Mary Terszak, brought up in Sister Kate's Home, commented 'Today it is hard to find myself as the Aboriginal person I was born to be.'[2] Many children who were raised in homes were damaged for life by the physical, sexual and psychological abuse that they suffered and by the lack of love they experienced.

Telling these hard stories, especially in a national institution like the Museum, is very important, because one of the dreadful things that children from homes have had to bear, among so much else, is that their stories of what they suffered were not believed. This exhibition says to the visitors who come *This happened — it happened in the lifetime of many of you — what they said was true*. This exhibition recognises a hidden and shameful part of our history that was the common experience of thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children — it exposes a failure of Australian governments to care for the most vulnerable members of the community — our children.

Jay Arthur *Curator, ATSIP*

1 Peter Read and Coral Edwards (eds), *The Lost Children*, Doubleday, Sydney. 1989 p. 59.
2 Conversation with Jay Arthur, 2011.

Blackfella Whitefella

The Yarn Tent at the Saltwater Freshwater Festival — Port Macquarie

Blackfella, Whitefella panel discussion in the 'yarn tent' Mingaletta Gunya. L to R, on stage, Alison Page, Margo Neale, Neil Murray, Katya Quigley, Aden Ridgeway and Tania Major

Margo and artist Milton Budge at the book launch

Saltwater Freshwater Festival is a mobile festival that is held on 26 January. This year it was held at Port Macquarie on the lands of the Birpai people; last year's event — the one-day inaugural Saltwater Freshwater Festival — took place at Coffs Harbour where over 12,000 people attended. With a regional rather than a national focus, this festival shares a strong emphasis on reconciliation as well as visibility and strength of culture with a commitment to sharing Koori living cultures with all Australians.

On the eve of the festival, I had the privilege of officially launching a beautifully produced book that introduced 39 artists from the region. It is the first such book on Aboriginal artists from the mid-north coast and distinguishes itself from most other art catalogues by emphasising the cultural value of the works, rather than their fine art value. These works are united in their diversity by a collective sense of connection, belonging and identity. I was one of the contributors to the catalogue providing an essay that relates how the works have a valid place as community expressions in the lineage of art history in this country, amongst other things.

Some festivals have a frenetic atmosphere and others, like this one, are relaxed; superbly organised and managed, as it was, by the small team known as the Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance Aboriginal Corporation, consisting mostly of women aided and abetted by dozens of volunteers and supporters.

Wafting in the sea breeze were the aromas of Indian curries, of Middle Eastern wraps and the earthy scents of bush tucker, marking the multinational flavour of the festival. The pulsating sounds of Troy Cassar-Daley, Neil Murray, Shellie Morris, the Riverbank Band and our own, Canberra-based, Dale Huddleston, raised the energy levels amid peels of laughter prompted by comedian Sean Choolburra's incredible wit.

Holding the festival on Australia Day, (or, as some prefer to call it, Invasion Day) is significant; it is intended to be inclusive of all Australians and to take some ownership of Australia Day. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, calling 26 January — the day of invasion — a day of independence, remains contentious. It was topics like this that dominated the panel discussion in the Yarn Tent, a large marquee where cultural issues of broad contemporary relevance were debated, and where I was a panel member.

This year's yarn theme was Blackfella Whitefella, taken from the title of one of Neil Murray's famous songs. The theme invited conversations around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, reconciliation, and the meaning of Australia Day. The panel was chaired by Festival director and program manager Alison Page, who is sometimes spotted on the ABC's popular *New Inventors* program. Her recent appointment to the expert panel for the proposed referendum to recognise Indigenous people in the Constitution drives her need to stimulate lots of talk about how we see our relationship, as Australia's first peoples, with the rest of the nation. She introduced the debate with a round up of pluses and minuses taking place over the past decade and, although she acknowledged the gains made — such as the bridge walks in 2000, the apology in 2008, and the fact that Reconciliation Australia has endorsed its 200th Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) — she did not shy away from discussing the racial tensions that occurred over the same period, such as the riots in Manly, Cronulla and Shellharbour. Port Macquarie was also 'gripped by a pack mentality' on Australia Day in 2009. The question posed by Alison and picked up by Festival patron Aden Ridgeway was,

GenerationOne Sunset Concert at the festival, 26 January 2011

Kate Budge proudly showing off the art book

Birpai Elder Uncle Bill O'Brien and Festival Director, Alison Page

'So where are we headed as a nation? Has Australia day given voice to racists?'

Aden spoke optimistically of our nation as a whole, highlighting our resilience and our capacity to rise to the challenge; to be 'better'. He recounted how race did not matter during the recent floods when everyone pulled together with a common objective. 'At the same time,' he said, 'while we have embraced Indigenous icons and made many gains, we still have to deal with the legacies of the past and sometimes we get too paralysed by it to respond.' He reminded us that over 90 per cent of Australians voted for us to be included in the census in 1967 and he commented that, for him, Australia Day is about how we all fit together as a nation, whilst acknowledging our people as the First Australians, especially in the Constitution.

Tania Major, representing one of the festival's sponsors, GenerationOne, made a feisty contribution to the debate with a plea for people to acknowledge the past but to stop living in it. Singer/songwriter Neil Murray, of Warumpi Band fame, also reflected on the progress made since the 1980s when he started on his personal quest to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues, before the word 'reconciliation' was ever heard.

I talked about the effectiveness of cross-cultural sharing and art in fostering reconciliation. I told the story of how I was able to soften a bunch of hardened High Court judges (dealing with Native Title) by taking them on a tour of our art in the Yiribana Gallery when I was a curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1990s. Through the arts, people can deal with confrontational issues in a non-confrontational way. I also spoke about the importance of a more active form of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency in cultural institutions, one more conducive to an authentic engagement where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being and thinking are embedded in business practices and processes. It is no good tossing around statistics, as a measure of reconciliation, with figures about how many blackfellas are employed if they occupy only the lower rungs of the hierarchy, and are thus without influence across the cultural institutions and their voices are confined to the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-only' areas.

The cheeky, clever, charismatic comedian and all round entertainer Sean Choolburra took the micky out of the seriousness of it all and wreaked havoc on the terms 'reconciliation', 'Australia Day' and 'identity', cracking the audience up big time. His contribution reminded me that humour is a serious business too, and has been one of our most powerful tools for survival, as it is for all oppressed/colonised peoples the world over.

An astute colleague, Phil Graetz, offered his view of the term 'reconciliation' as being not dissimilar to the process of the same name that is used in accounting where the debit and credit columns — the gains and the losses — are brought into balance, which seems to me to best reflect the gist of what was said by the panel and is a clear explanation for the term.

Some 52 per cent of the 12,000 Aboriginal people of the mid-north-coast region are under the age of 19 with only nine per cent over the age of 55 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006), which is why festivals like this one are incredibly important. They unify the mob to pull together and help the Elders keep the culture strong, and keep the young fellas tracking culture with pride. A strong identity equates to physical and spiritual wellbeing for our people. The Alliance is working with 10 communities who are supported by 10 land councils to provide culturally based employment opportunities for our youth, including events like this with a focus on arts, design, cultural tourism and business.

Margo Neale *Senior Curator*

Photos: Margo Neale

Pintupi Dialogues:
Reclaiming History

Ronnie Tjampitjinpa speaks with Fred Myers via satellite phone at a community meeting to discuss the project, Kintore June 2009

Pip Deveson

Screening of the 1974 footage for the community at Kiwirrkura, October 2010

Peter Thorley

As among the last Aboriginal people to have lived a foraging life, Pintupi people have intermittently held the Australian public's eye and been in the forefront of developments in Australia's stance towards its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Like many Aboriginal communities, however, the Pintupi have very few records of their own history. The return and re-documentation of film and photographic material can offer the chance to change this. This is the goal of our collaborative project to repatriate culturally, and further document, 10 hours of historical film footage from the 1974 Pintupi community of Yayayi.

Yayayi was one of the first 'outstation' communities in Australia, a movement away from the large government settlement of Papunya supported by the Australian Government's new policy of 'self-determination'. The film footage of life at Yayayi provides a unique record of this moment. Together with the members of the current Kintore and Kiwirrkura communities, our project (we call ourselves the 'Yayayi Film Project') is using film and photography to reflect on a pivotal period in Pintupi history.

In 1964, internationally renowned filmmaker, Ian Dunlop, accompanying then patrol officer Jeremy Long, had photographed Pintupi people who were still living a nomadic life in central Australia's Western Desert. Ian returned to the area in 1974 to film these same people, now living at Yayayi outstation (where I was at the time carrying out my doctoral fieldwork).

In 2006, when I took the recently transferred footage to Kintore and Kiwirrkura, with Ian's blessing, to show it for the first time to the Pintupi, the response from the community was joyous, leading us to plan the project with community support. We have since received a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and, more recently, from the Australian Research Council (ARC), to work on the film material with a number of Pintupi consultants. Our aim is to extend documentation of the material to include contemporary responses to it, as part of Pintupi 'historical memory'.

Along with my collaborators, Peter Thorley of the National Museum of Australia and Pip Deveson from the Australian National University (ANU), and with the support of Papunya Tula Artists, we began that work in Canberra in June 2010, when two Pintupi women came to work with us on the film material. Irene Nangala and Monica Robinson Nangala — Puntjina and Ampi in their own language — see the film project as linked to their plans for a 30-year anniversary for the Pintupi community at Kintore and as representing a step in the Pintupi trajectory of moving back to their own country. We recorded the women's discussion of the film material, as well as other non-Indigenous participants in the film events. Subsequently, we travelled up to Kintore and Kiwirrkura in October 2010 to record similar interviews with Bobby West Tjupurrula and Jimmy Brown Tjampitjinpa.

Peter Thorley

Charlie Tjapangarti (standing), George Tjungurrayi, Fred Myers and Sam Tjapanangka viewing the footage at Kintore, October 2010

Fred Myers

Irene Nangala, Rosemary & Ian Dunlop, Pip Deveson, Peter Thorley, Monica Robinson Nangala and Fred Myers Canberra, July 2010

Irene and Monica have provided extraordinary insights during the process of translation and commentary. Trained as schoolteachers and perceptive translators, they have become crucial collaborators on the project because of their interest in Pintupi history. We spent several days engaged with the 'classical' and eloquent Pintupi language that was spoken by their grandfathers and grandmothers, what Irene and Monica describe as 'really strong language'. Their memories of the people we see in the footage and their guidance in what the community might want to see from the film has been illuminating. They have made the project into a enormously significant one, something beyond any of our initial expectations.

Bobby West and Jimmy Brown hosted us at Kiwirrkura, where we screened the footage again for the community, and sought their advice on significant themes in this archive. They stressed the importance of Aboriginal leadership, the responsibilities of leaders, and — as with the Kintore mob — the importance of self-determination in their history.

Joining with us is Nicolas Peterson, Professor of Anthropology at the ANU and well-known scholar of photography, on the ARC Linkage Grant entitled, 'Pintupi Dialogues: Reconstructing Memories Of Art, Land And Community Through The Visual Record'. We will be working more broadly with the Pintupi communities to develop the resources for historical consciousness, and cultural heritage, drawing particularly on Ian Dunlop's film but also his 600 still photographs from 1964. These images were taken of many of the same people and their parents when they were living a completely independent foraging life 'beyond the frontier'. Indeed, after our discussions with Irene and Monica, we will probably extend ourselves to collect other resources for a Pintupi history where they 'tell their story'.

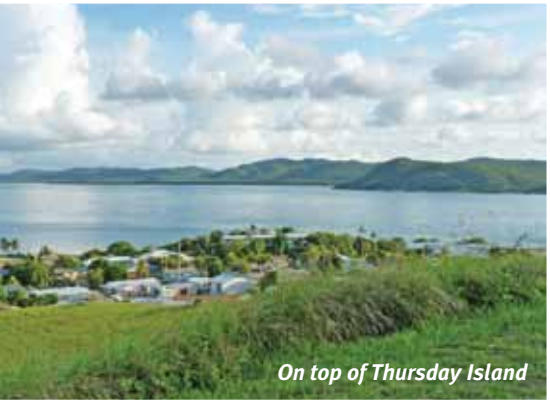
Using these visual records as the basis for dialogue, we want to generate an account of how the Pintupi have sought to fashion their own modernity, with a particular emphasis on the great transition in their lives that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. We know such a history is important to the Pintupi, faced as they are with a burgeoning population of young people and the rapid disappearance of older community members who have knowledge of this transition. It will help the younger generation to understand what those making the transition struggled for; and how, against seemingly insuperable odds, they first got their own outstation at Yayayi, eventually leading to their own towns of Kintore and Kiwirrkura in some of the most remote areas of the Western Desert.

Fred Myers *Chair of Anthropology, New York University*

‘My Beautiful TI’

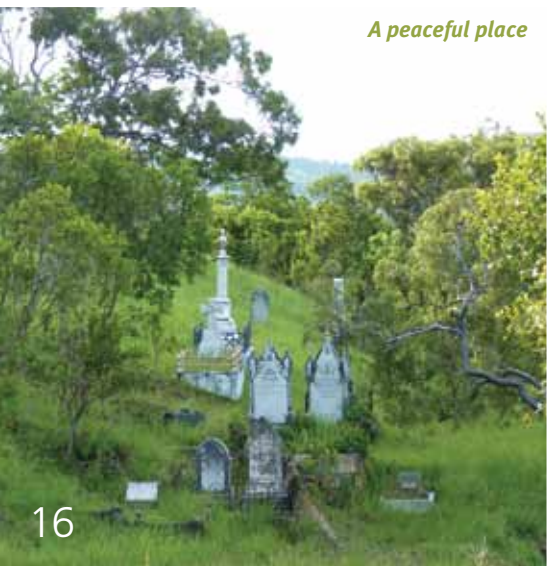
Tinny and beach

Staff at Gab Titui and Pip in front of Ephraim Bani gallery



On top of Thursday Island

Mary Mills, Emma Loban, Robyn Fernandez, Mary Bani, Bronwyn Jewell



A peaceful place

I left Canberra for Thursday Island on a very cool morning in November 2010. Flying to Sydney — a bit warmer, then Cairns — much warmer, and over the Great Barrier Reef to Horn Island where it was a perfect day: clear sky, warm air and the water was many hues of blue. But, that was not the end of the journey, there was still a short ferry ride.

On the ferry to Thursday Island, I meet the famous crooner, Uncle Seaman Dan sitting on the top deck.

‘Good to see you. You’re looking well,’ I said.

‘Steady, steady,’ he replied, which was the name of his first album and is also his catchphrase.

My colleague Andy Greenslade had interviewed Uncle Seaman previously, when we were at the Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair in 2010. His songs represent the life and warmth and harmonies of the Torres Strait Islands. His attachment to Thursday Island is expressed especially in the famous song ‘My beautiful TI’. He has won a Deadly Award and two ARIA Awards for his albums. Although he has sung all his life, his music career really took off when in 1999, at the age of 69, he met his music producer Dr Karl Neuenfeldt. Since that meeting, Uncle Seaman has produced five successful albums.

Today, Thursday Island is the Torres Strait’s administrative centre and it can be a bustling place. While the streets can be quiet, there is often activity on the water with small boats skimming between the islands. It is hot — but be careful where you swim. Many crocodiles hide in the water — waiting …

When I arrived, everyone on Thursday Island was pleased that the wind had stopped blowing but the humidity was huge. In summer, people have been known to catch a lift across the road! Most offices are air-conditioned and the café at the Gab Titui Cultural Centre is a lovely shaded outdoor area with lots of cooling fans — and great food and coffee.

I was on Thursday Island to discuss plans for an exhibition that the Museum will host later this year — *Bipotaim* (before time)*: Stories from the Torres Strait*. The exhibition includes photographs of Torres Strait Islanders that were commissioned by Gab Titui. David Callow is the photographer and the staff at Gab Titui facilitated the cultural documentation to accompany this project. I met with the staff at Gab Titui Cultural Centre and it was very easy to see that they are, rightly, very proud of what they’ve achieved with this project.

Bipotaim: Stories from the Torres Strait is an exhibition of portraits but it is also about listening to and acknowledging the stories of the past and present and ideas about the future. *Bipotaim* documents stories from four communities in the Torres Strait and their recollections of events before and after the 1967 referendum. The communities involved were Masig, Moa Island (St Pauls), Saibai and Thursday Island.

The people of the Torres Strait have a proud and powerful history which traditional story-tellers have treasured and kept intact for centuries.

It is history that celebrates those who inspired and shaped their own communities. It acknowledges people who fostered a spirit of cultural strength and identity, uniting the inhabitants across a region of more than 200 islands. David Callow 2007

The Museum is very pleased to be able share these stories from the top of Australia and bring the exhibition *Bipotaim* to a wider audience. Objects from the collections held at the National Museum of Australia will also be on display. We’ll look forward to seeing the palms swaying in the breeze as we play the interviews that were recorded. From this exhibition Museum visitors will get a better sense of the location, lifestyle and cultural perspectives of people living in the Torres Strait.

In ‘TI Blues’, Uncle Seaman sings that Canberra doesn’t thrill him — but, Canberra is thrilled that *Bipotaim: Stories from the Torres Strait* will open at the Museum’s Torres Strait Islander Gallery on 15 September 2011.

Pip McNaught *Curator, ATSIP*

Photos: Pip McNaught

Gab Titui Cultural Centre, Thursday Island

Cynthia Tapim *(Pictured left)*

Hello, my name is Cynthia Tapim. I come from Murray Island in the Torres Strait. I began work at the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island at the beginning of this year, and I feel very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to travel to the National Museum of Australia on a two-week Professional Development Internship.

At Gab Titui I assisted the retail officer and the gallery officer with the daily procedures at the front of house. To be given the opportunity to interact with the staff in different areas of the National Museum has been wonderful and I have learnt so many new things. During my time at the Museum I have been able to improve upon some of the skills that I acquired during my time at Gab Titui.

Over the past two weeks my colleague, Thelma Savage, and I have had placements in many areas including Visitor Services, Photography with George Serras, Exhibitions, Conservation and Retail. All of these areas were chosen because of the variety of roles that we undertake at Gab Titui and knowing that the experiences will be beneficial not just for myself, but for future staff of the Centre.

I would like to thank Michael Pickering, Pip McNaught and the wonderful staff of the National Museum of Australia for taking the time to show us how the many areas of the Museum work. I have learnt so much during my internship and I look forward to putting this new knowledge into practice in my role at the Gab Titui Cultural Centre. Thank you!

Cynthia Tapim *Intern*

Thelma Savage *(Pictured right)*

Hi! I'm Thelma Savage and I am from the Torres Strait Islands. I hold the gallery officer position at the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island. As a Torres Strait Islander, I have a passion to help conserve my culture and to create awareness about the Torres Strait region, people and culture.

My colleague, Cynthia Tapim, and I are very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to spend two weeks as interns at the National Museum of Australia. We have given our internships a great deal of thought regarding which of the departments we would like to work with, to get an idea of how each of the departments operate. The departments we have chosen to work with relate to our job descriptions and I believe that the experiences we have gained will benefit not only us but our workplace also.

I have learnt many new and interesting things ranging from the many types of exhibition information panels, how to effectively kill mould, and the different shutter speeds in photography. Just seeing how the Museum operates and the time and effort that goes into an exhibition has given me many new ideas to take back to the Gab Titui.

I would like to thank Mike Pickering and the friendly staff at the Museum for being such wonderful hosts and for taking the time from their busy schedules to explain and show us how the different departments of the Museum operates. I would especially like to thank Pip McNaught for taking such good care of us in Canberra. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the National Museum and look forward to visiting again in the near future.

Thelma Savage *Intern*

Representing Woorabinda's Stories

The Gallery of First Australians has new exhibits developing all the time. *Woorabinda* is one of the latest to open. *Woorabinda* presents very personal stories from several members of the community representing different aspects and experiences of living in a town that was originally a government-controlled Aboriginal reserve. The stories vary from a stockman's memory of landscape and acknowledgement of the changes that have taken place over the last century, to the expressed pride felt when, in the 1980s, the community leaders started managing and making decisions for their community, their town, and their future.

Woorabinda is a community located in Queensland, a four-hour drive inland from Rockhampton. When Jay Arthur and I visited Woorabinda in 2008 we went with the aim of listening to how the people would like themselves and their community to be represented in the Museum. We asked what stories they wanted to share that would best reflect the character, historical changes and personal experiences of Woorabinda as a town and as a community. Representing a community in a museum can be daunting and promising at the same time. The end result — the display — has to meet the original aims of the project and still have room to include in it all the personal, social and cultural investments, both tangible and intangible, that are revealed as planning goes forward.

The exhibit as seen in the Gallery of First Australians

The main aim was to represent a community history through personal stories, offering an insider's view into life at Woorabinda. Representing the personal objects and stories of several community members demonstrates that history and events are something we all experience in diverse ways. What we each hold in our memory reflects our personal knowledge and cultural values and is also expressed in our daily lives.

For this project, community members became storytellers as they shared their experiences. Their stories reflect a different perspective on our nation's history. Campbell Leisha shared knowledge about the young stockman's training program. He reflected on the difference in today's style of training to the training he received as a young man. Aunty Edna Alley spoke about her life, as a young girl on the reserve, and how her father only spoke his language when he was away from the reserve and out of earshot of the officials. She also reflected on why he didn't teach her his language for fear of reprisals. Wally Saunders spoke about his Cultural Healing program and some of the work he does with the schools and aged-care programs in the community. Rose Thaiday spoke about her experiences growing up in the dormitory and some of the work that she does now in the school.

Bill Thaiday spoke about how the people of Woorabinda managed the challenges of living on a reserve with 52 different cultural groups. Groups, and individuals, from all across Queensland were deposited at Woorabinda, each with a different language, cultural protocols, living practices; some of the groups were warring. Yet, these issues were not considered by government officials when they set the reserve up in 1926, nor as they continued to deposit people there up until 1967.

The Museum is honoured to have *Woorabinda* be represented in our exhibitions program. In some ways, the story of Woorabinda is similar to stories of other missions and reserves that were set up around Australia since the late 1800s, in that it tells the history of Aboriginal people being 'rounded-up' and forced to live in an environment in which every aspect of their lives was overseen and controlled by government officials. Yet, there are so many stories and experiences that are unique to Woorabinda. Just like there are many reasons why the people who live there are proud of their community.

Barbara Paulson *Curator, ATSIP*

Overseas digital collections

The* von Stieglitz Brothers' *case displaying* Wathaurung artefacts' *(3 shields, 2 clubs, 1 boomerang, 1 basket, 1 emu feather apron)

The Museum is currently working on two trial projects for a new website initiative called the Overseas Collections Digitisation Project. The aim of this project is to identify, digitally copy, and make accessible, significant collections relating to Australian history which are held in overseas museums.

The Museum will create a special web feature for these collections detailing and celebrating their significance for Australian history. Links will be made between the Museum's website and those places where the collections are housed, fostering a network of relationships with Australian objects around the world. When Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material is involved, a more specific aim is to provide information about these collections to their communities of origin.

An initial method of selecting objects for the digitisation project is to focus on overseas collections that are loaned to the Museum for inclusion in its exhibition program. The trial projects involve two early collections of Australian objects from the Wathaurung/Kulin Nation people of south-eastern Australia.

Wathaurung objects from National Museum of Northern Ireland

One collection is held in the National Museum of Northern Ireland in Belfast. It was placed in that museum in 1856 by an Irishman called John von Stieglitz. The collection initially included over 50 objects and the National Museum of Australia borrowed eight of these for display in its temporary exhibition *Not Just Ned*, which ran from 17 March to 31 July 2011. The objects illustrate early Aboriginal and Irish relations at the Port Phillip settlement, and include three intricately carved shields, two clubs, a boomerang, a beautiful woven basket and an ochred, emu-feather skirt. All of these objects were obtained by the von Stieglitz family over a 20-year period between 1835, when they arrived in the newly formed Port Phillip settlement as pastoralists, and 1855 when they returned home to Ireland.

Of the 53 artefacts that were part of the original donation, only 41 remain today. Surviving objects include shields, clubs, boomerangs, spear-throwers and spears, an emu-feather skirt, a duck snare, and a woven basket. The Museum is currently negotiating for all of these objects to be photographed and digital images provided for the website project. Additionally, the Museum will digitise important documents and sketches related to this collection that are available within Australia.

Wathaurung objects from the Saffron Walden Museum, England

The other collection objects will be loaned from the Saffron Walden Museum near Cambridge in England. This collection was formed by Van Diemen's Land surveyor and pastoralist John Helder Wedge. Wedge was one of the first Europeans to explore the area and then take sheep across to Port Phillip, and he made a collection from Wathaurung/Kulin Nation Aboriginal people after 1835 and before 1838, when he gave the objects to the Saffron Walden Natural History society on a return trip to England.

Wedge's collection originally included shields, clubs, boomerangs, spear-throwers, spears, a wooden bowl and a possum-skin cloak and, today, it represents the earliest collection of material known to have survived from this area. The Museum is borrowing a selection of these objects for the 'Melbourne module' of our newly developed permanent gallery *Landmarks: People and Places across Australia*, which opened in June this year. This is a 10-year exhibition, and four objects from the Saffron Walden collection will be displayed in the first five-year loan, and a further four will come to the Museum for a second five-year period.

The development of these website projects will provide digital images of the entire collections, and will be important for fully exploring and explaining the significance of early Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections to Australian history. Through the wider project, details of significant overseas collections will extend the National Museum's ability and role in providing accessible information to and other Australian communities.

Carol Cooper *Senior Curator, Collections Development Unit*

Saving our heritage

Photo: Robert Yates

Donna checking objects for any nasties before they go into exhibitions and/or collection storage

Fibre and yarn basket with orange coloured centre by Rosie Williams

There are many reasons why we should have museums. For me, it is to preserve our history and to educate. Many people around the world value their culture and history and want to maintain a link to where they came from. Australians are no different. My role at the National Museum of Australia is to assist in preserving the life of an object or item. Conservators are doctors to objects. We want to leave behind our heritage.

When an object arrives at the National Museum of Australia it is inspected for pests and hazards to ensure that it does not threaten our nation's collection or the staff that want to educate and preserve. It sounds very serious, and it is.

Objects arrive from all over Australia and, occasionally, internationally. On arrival we look for hazards, from abrus seeds (which can be poisonous if swallowed) and hunting spears (these can be very sharp or could carry remnants of poison) to red-back spiders, radiation and asbestos.

In 2009, a collection of coil baskets from Western Australia was selected to be included in the Museum's collection. At its place of origin, the baskets were inspected for insect activity and sealed in a plastic bag, as a precaution, before being shipped to Canberra. Even though the baskets appeared pest-free in Western Australia, following standard Museum procedure the coil baskets were inspected on arrival in Canberra. Several wriggling larvae were found and basic treatment was required to prevent degradation to the coil baskets.

This involved wrapping the baskets in calico fabric, sealing them in a plastic bag from which the air was removed, ready for freezer treatment. The objects were then snap frozen at –20 °C for a week as the dramatic decrease in temperature kills insects, larvae and eggs. The calico absorbs moisture limiting condensation forming on the objects during the freezing or thawing process. Once treatment is completed, we can be assured that the object is safe to be stored amongst the rest of the collection.

Objects on display and in storage are routinely inspected for insects. Our Integrated Pest Management plan limits the use of pesticides, so regular checks of our galleries and storerooms are important — the cleaning never ends. Currently on display in the upper Gallery of First Australians is a contemporary possum-skin cloak from the Tooloyn Koortakay Collection. Parts of this gallery have natural light and this attracts insects, such as adult carpet beetle, which are drawn to the edible materials in this area such as fur and skin. Conservation staff, inspect and clean this gallery and treat objects to eliminate insects.

Our prevention does not end here. The environmental conditions that are maintained in the Museum also assist in preservation. Relative humidity, temperature, light levels, pollutants and dust are all monitored to ensure that the Museum environment is appropriate for objects, visitors and staff.

With assistance from many other areas in the Museum, Conservation staff work together to restore and preserve our collection for future generations. Our collection is in safe hands.

Donna Wilks *Preventive Officer, Conservation*

Gunditjmara possum-skin cloak called 'Palooyn wanyoo ngeeye alam Meen' (Possum-skin cloak for our Ancestor). Made by Debra Couzens and Vicki Couzens.

Save our site

Brenda Saunders was secretary of the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC) which campaigned vigorously to save the Australian Hall. She created this digital poster in 1997, to mark the conclusion of a six-year campaign to save the 1913 Australian Hall, also known as the Cyprus Hellene Club, at 150–152 Elizabeth Street in Sydney.

The print features a collage of photographs related to the building, which was the venue for the first significant Aboriginal protest in 1938. It also contains photos of Aboriginal activists of the 1930s and of the present day and news clippings of the events. The poster was not mass-produced and only three copies of it were ever printed.

The poster includes images of the Aborigines Progressive Association leaders: William Ferguson is on the far left, William Cooper, centre, and John (Jack) Patten is on the far right of the main central panel. Other images are of Mrs Briggs, Pearl Gibbs, Bert Groves, W Foster, and Ray Peckham. All of these people were the original members of the organising committee. The images above the hall are of members of the NAHHC and descendants of the original committee holding a vigil at the site in 1996.

The Australian Hall was the place where the Aborigines Progressive Association held the first Aboriginal protest on 26 January 1938, the sesquicentenary of the arrival of the First Fleet.[1] While the non-Indigenous population was celebrating, Aboriginal people gathered together in the Australian Hall to discuss the manifesto that had been written by Bill Ferguson and Jack Patten prior to the meeting. The opening statement of the manifesto reads:

> The 26th of January, 1938, is not a day of rejoicing for[1] Australia's Aborigines; it is a day of mourning. This festival of 150 years' so-called 'progress' in Australia commemorates also 150 years of misery and degradation imposed upon the original native inhabitants by the white invaders of this country. We, representing the Aborigines, now ask you, the reader of this appeal, to pause in the midst of your sesqui-centenary rejoicings and ask yourself honestly whether your 'conscience' is clear in regard to the treatment of the Australian blacks by the Australian whites during the period of 150 years' history which you celebrate?[2]

The 1938 Day of Mourning and Protest came after 10 long years of attempts by Aboriginal people to bring about changes to the rules of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. These rules prevented Aboriginal people from living on their own land, working where they wanted to and the freedom to move around the countryside without permission from white managers. The meeting formulated a list of 10 demands which were presented to the prime minister, Joseph Lyons, on 31 January 1938. This 10-point list included demands that were to form the basis for the constitutional amendments endorsed by the Australian people in the referendum of 27 May 1967.[3]

There are two parts to the story that is told by the *Save Our Site* poster. One is of the awakening of the Aboriginal movement for rights leading to the 1967 referendum. The other is the struggle for acceptance of cultural, political and historical heritage against commercial interests in the heart of prime metropolitan real estate, and in the face of heritage rules and criteria that reflected only a eurocentric view of history. Until the NAHHC campaign of the 1990s, no urban structure had formally or legally been recognised as significant in Aboriginal history and the criteria for heritage significance reflected this. The difficulties that faced the NAHHC were foreshadowed by the words of the officer of the Heritage Council who first received the call advising them of the probable Aboriginal heritage value of the Australian Hall: 'But it can't be an Aboriginal site, it's a European-built building.'[4]

This campaign marks a turning point in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage matters. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history was deemed to be pre-1788, after which colonial and 'Australian' history took precedence in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage was recognised only in such things as rock shelters, rock art and in natural phenomenon such as Uluru. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dominance had been pushed to the margins of urban society and to the outback regions where First Australians still lived a more or less 'traditional' life. Listing this building and providing legal protection for it indicated the beginning of some acceptance of a shared black and white history since 1788 and the emergence of a new, altered First Australian culture that is continuing to grow within urban areas. Brenda Saunders's poster celebrates this.

Andy Greenslade *Curator, ATSIP*

1 B Meehan and A Greenslade (eds), *The Art of Place: the Fourth National Indigenous Heritage Art Award*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1998.
2 http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/c_building/wc2_ahevent.html
3 Ibid p4
4 Ibid p4

The Corroboree board game

The 'Corroboree' board game is an example of the intense interest in, and appropriation of, Aboriginal art and cultural motifs by non-Indigenous artists and consumers. The game was created and designed by artist Jessie MacQueen Mackintosh (1892–1958) in 1943, patented in 1945, and produced soon after under license from John Sands Ltd by GN Raymond Pty Ltd of Collingwood, Victoria. Jessie Mackintosh was a painter, printmaker, designer and photographer. She studied and produced art during a period of enthusiasm for Aboriginal motifs in art. Although it seems to have had little influence on her own art practice, Mackintosh did follow the trend and used Aboriginal motifs in her commercial illustrations.

In the board game 'Corroboree', Mackintosh used not only Aboriginal motifs, but also illustrations of traditional Aboriginal life and cultural events. Stops on the track include: '5 Dig for honey ants — miss one; 13 Throw boomerang — run to emu; 45 Pointing bone — out of game; 87 Lost churinga (shield) — back to 71'. The explanatory notes that accompany the game are an attempt to broaden the knowledge of the players about Indigenous culture, particularly the Arunta people of Central Australia and possibly, at a time when responses to Aboriginal culture were changing, to give an air of educational authenticity to the game. The publisher cites Sir Baldwin Spencer and FJ Gillen's influential anthropological work from central and northern Australia as the references used in the compilation of the game.

The game reflects both the attitudes of non-Indigenous Australians towards their own identity and their constructions of 'Aboriginality'. During the mid-twentieth century, Central Australian Aboriginal culture was used to define all Aboriginal culture for many non-Indigenous Australians. Since the increasing engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in western art markets, there has been a reclaiming of cultural iconography by each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group/nation that has included the rigorous application of copyright laws. This object is truly a product of its time. It is an example of how social attitudes are reflected in common objects that are Australian designed, manufactured and marketed for a non-Indigenous audience.

Sharon Goddard *Curator, ATSIP*

Kaiwalagal

by David Bosun & Solomon Booth

Linocut prints are one of the major forms of contemporary expression of Torres Strait Islander culture today. This print is by renowned artists David Bosun and Solomon Booth. It references the impact of Native Title in the Torres Straits. In this piece, *Kaiwalagal*, Bosun and Booth detail the significant struggles of the Kaurareg people as they continue in the fight to maintain their identity and culture and to secure control of their traditional land and sea.

The Kaurareg people are the traditional owners of the Prince of Wales group of islands including Muralag (Prince of Wales), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Waiben (Thursday Island), Mawai (Wednesday Island), Zuna (Entrance Island) and Kirriri (Hammond Island). The Kaurareg creation stories tell of an Aboriginal warrior (pictured at the centre of the print) who travelled from central Australia to Muralag where he created many of the places that are sacred to the Kaurareg people.

The Kaurareg have names for all their important places and still today talk to their ancestors when they visit these places or perform particular rituals. They believe that these sites of significance and natural phenomena involve spirits which must be appeased. If the spirits are not addressed properly, fishing and hunting will be unsuccessful.

The lives and lifestyle of the Kaurareg people were dramatically affected by the arrival, last century, of Europeans. Lives were lost not only to the wave of new diseases that were introduced by Europeans but also during battle and retaliation raids with the new settlers. The forced removal of the Kaurareg to Moa Island in 1922 caused great distress to the people who had inhabited their islands for centuries. They stayed on Moa for 25 years until, in 1947, the Elders led their people back to Ngurupai.

On 23 May 2001, the Kaurareg were given back their custodial rights by the Queensland Government under the Native Title Act 1993. 'This has brought recognition and respect to the traditional land rights of the Kaurareg people and protection for their sacred places.'[1]

Coming from such a rich tradition of carvers and a culture of seafaring people, Bosun and Booth's work is a personal account of a significant historical event. It relays the social context and celebrates the beauty and shared pride in the sea and environment that has sustained their people for centuries.

Carly Jia *Curator, ATSIP*

1 J Winter, *Native Title Business: Contemporary Indigenous Art*, Southport, Keeaira Press, 2002.

Celebrating the 1985 hand-back of Uluru

This T-shirt celebrates the 1985 hand-back of Uluru (Ayers Rock) to its traditional owners. It is an example of the way that popular culture celebrates, protests and supports significant events such as the Australian Government's decision to hand Uluru back to its traditional owners and the subsequent joint management of the Uluru Park. The T-shirt was purchased by Brad Manera as a souvenir, and was subsequently worn to show personal support for Aboriginal Australians.

Recognised as a significant national icon by all Australians, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is one of the few World Heritage sites that is listed for both its natural and cultural values. On 26 October 1985, a crowd of approximately 3000 people gathered at Uluru, Central Australia, for the official ceremony to hand back the land to the traditional owners. Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen presented the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Title Deeds to Nipper Winmatti and other representatives of the Anangu, the traditional owners.

The official speeches, made by Sir Ninian Stephen and Yami Lester (Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Board chairman from 1986–96), were translated into Pitjantjatjara language. The event attracted national and international media, and involved Indigenous peoples from throughout Australia. A journalist who was present at the ceremony made the following comment: 'A sea of black faces, the red earth, and the red, black and yellow Aboriginal colours on headbands, T-shirts and flags ... waiting for the representatives of white man's society to "give back" what had been theirs for 40,000 years'.[1]

At the same ceremony, the traditional owners signed a 99-year lease with the National Parks and Wildlife Service as part of a joint-management arrangement that would ensure the maintenance of Anangu tradition and best practice for tourism, science, media and cultural heritage protection interests. This project has involved training programs in all aspects of park management for Anangu people and in cross-cultural exchange, enabling Anangu traditional skills and knowledge to be successfully transferred into various aspects of the park's operation and administration. The example of Uluru joint management marks a significant moment in the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protest and land-right struggles

The T-shirt was purchased by Manera from a shop at Uluru in the Christmas/New Year period of December 1985/January 1986, following the official hand-back of Uluru to the traditional owners. He wore the T-shirt on several occasions, including Australia Day, to show his support for Aboriginal rights and particularly for the hand-back. The T-shirt features wording in Anangu and English languages: 'Nyuntu Anangu Maruku Ngurangka Ngaranyi /You Are On Aboriginal Land'.

The item is representative of and related to a broader range of Aboriginal protest material that was created as part of the Land Rights movement. As Penny Taylor has written, 'for over a decade, First Australians have worn their history in T-shirts and other clothing featuring indigenous designs and slogans ... the red, yellow and black of the Aboriginal flag are worn as a symbol of identity and pride'.[2] The imagery of the Aboriginal flag has been adapted for the purposes of the T-shirt, with the yellow circle at the centre of the flag changed to symbolise the shape of Uluru. The image, therefore, incorporates the land, people and sun aspects of the flag's design.

Both Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) have great cultural significance to the Anangu. The listing of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park as a World Heritage site acknowledges the role of the Anangu as traditional custodians and their understanding of, and interaction with, the landscape. As part of the joint-management agreement, tours are conducted to inform visitors about the local flora and fauna, bush foods, and traditions associated with the area.

Jennifer Wilson *Curator, People and the Environment*

1 *Desert Star*, 1985.
2 Penny Taylor, *Telling It Like It Is: A Guide to Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History*, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1996, p3.

Next issue highlights

- More stories from the Forgotten Australians exhibition
  Inside: Life in children's homes
- Learn more about the exhibition *Off the Walls* which includes art and objects representing 40 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
- See more of the public activities that occur in the Museum
- See more objects from our National Historical Collection
- Updates on other new and continuing projects.

Next issue due out in April 2012.

Shoes worn by Nova Peris during her athletic career

Some Canning Stock Route artists shared stories illustrated with sand drawings

Inside the Yalangbara *exhibition*

hello

The National Museum of Australia is a place that celebrates our peoples and our culture of storytelling. It is a place where we can explore our relationships to each other, the places we live in, and the objects representing our cultures and events in our past.

The Museum is the place where we come together to share stories of our unique and culturally diverse nation, to be part of a national conversation.

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Our story.

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